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# EXPANDED EXECUTIVE SUMMARY EVALUATION OF THE EDUCATION SUPPORT PROGRAM (ESP) USAID/EGYPT

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## **EXPANDED EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The USAID/Egypt Education Support Program (ESP) was a three-year nationwide activity of support to the Ministry of Education (MOE) to restore stability and build the quality of the public education system in the period immediately following the January 2011 revolution. At the conclusion of the ESP (February 28, 2015), USAID/Egypt contracted a team of external evaluators to carry out a final performance evaluation of the program. The evaluation had two primary objectives:

- To review analyze, and evaluate the effectiveness of USAID-funded ESP activities in achieving program objectives and completing deliverables; and,
- To provide specific recommendations and lessons learned to ensure that future funding for capacity-building in the areas for Boards of Trustees (BOTs), teacher training, and remedial reading are directed to activities that have the highest potential to achieve improved and sustainable results.

The evaluation was carried out over a six-week period in February and March 2015, by a team of four evaluators, two from the United States and two from Egypt. The contractor for the evaluation was DevTech Systems, Inc. (DevTech) and its subcontractor, the QED Group, LLC (QED).

USAID/Egypt identified six questions to frame the evaluation:

- To what extent has the project been able to achieve its planned overall objectives?
- To what extent has BOT participation increased, in terms of effective school management?
- To what extent have students' reading skills improved?
- How has teacher performance changed?
- To what extent are the project's achievements and results sustainable?
- Based on the evaluation findings, what are the lessons learned from the project's inception to date that USAID should take into consideration in the design of future activities in this area?

### **The Education Support Program**

The ESP began in October 2011, and was designed by USAID/Egypt and the MOE to meet the urgent need to respond to post-revolution demands to strengthen public education. Local communities were mobilized and seeking a role in ensuring their children's schooling and security. In response to citizen pressure, the Ministry had hired more than 130,000 Assistant Teachers (ATs), most without teaching experience or training, to fill staff shortages throughout the country. These ATs required immediate training to be effective in the classroom and to qualify for full-time permanent positions. These two immediate needs defined the two principal components of the ESP:

- Building the capacity of the Board of Trustees (BOT) and the MOE Social Work Department to become more effective governance bodies for the schools; and

- Strengthening the capacity of local districts (*idaras*) nationwide to build the basic pedagogical skills of the ATs.

The underlying rationale/hypothesis for the program focused on training. Intensive training for the new assistant teachers was intended to improve teaching practices and thereby increase students' literacy. Training of the MOE Social Work Department staff would increase their capacity to train the schools' Boards of Trustees (BOTs) and thereby increase effective community participation in school governance. Importantly, the ESP was implemented nationwide through a central office in Cairo and five regional offices, working directly with governorate and district MOE offices and officials. The quantitative targets for training and capacity-building were ambitious, in response to the magnitude of the demand generated by the revolution. A project modification at the start of the second year added several new activities, including a remedial reading and writing program for grades 4 to 6, in selected districts.

### **Evaluation Design and Methods**

USAID/Egypt allocated six weeks for the final performance evaluation and specified that field visits and data collection were to be conducted in two contrasting regions, the urban governorates of Cairo and Alexandria, and three governorates in Upper Egypt, Minya, Assiut, and Sohag. Given these parameters, a mixed method design was used, with a primary reliance on project documentation and qualitative data collected through personal and group interviews, supplemented by classroom observation and a short survey of recently hired teachers in the five governorates.

In applying the mixed methods approach, multiple sources of information are brought to bear for each topic and cross-examined. For the questions on education quality (i.e., the AT training and remedial reading and writing), the quantitative classroom observations and survey responses were examined to verify and quantify the perceptions of training effectiveness reported in interviews with teachers and school directors. In turn, the qualitative interviews provided guides to interpret the statistical results.

The qualitative data sources utilized in the evaluation included interviews in 16 primary and preparatory schools in the five governorates, with ATs, school directors, remedial reading teachers, and scientific club coordinators. The evaluation team met with teachers, trainers, parents, and students involved in seven scientific clubs in Cairo (2), Alexandria (4), and Sohag (1). The extent of the visit and discussion, as well as the size and depth of the experience varied considerably across schools. The team also conducted individual and group interviews in the MOE district and governorate offices where the schools were located, with top officials and representatives of the training and reading units, and the social work departments. BOT focus group interviews were held as a part of each school visit. The team also met with the principal partners and stakeholders of the program at the national level, including various units of the MOE and the Professional Academy for Teachers (PAT) as well as the ESP staff and USAID/Egypt. Data collection in the field was done during a two-week period, and included more than 80 individual and group interviews in the five governorates.

Quantitative methods included a survey of 1362 Assistant Teachers (ATs), with and without ESP training to capture their perception of the training and of its effect on their performance, and 120 classroom

observations for trained and untrained teachers to assess the application of the training lessons. Trained local data collectors were contracted to conduct the survey and classroom observations.

Lastly, in addition to the qualitative and quantitative primary data sources, the team utilized project documentation, ESP monitoring information, and ESP research reports and impact assessments.

It is important to note that given the time and resource constraints of the evaluation, the primary data collected by the evaluation team measures perceptions of behavior and behavior change and does not provide direct measures of actual behavior. Further, because the ESP did not collect baseline data for key indicators in 2011, the evaluation team had no basis to assess the magnitude of change in factors like effectiveness of BOT participation in school management, improvements in reading skills, or changes in teacher performance. The perceptions are indicative of change and related to behavior, but they are less reliable than direct measures of behavior, particularly as predictors of future behavior.

### **Findings and Conclusions of the Evaluation**

The six evaluation questions frame the reporting of the evaluation results. The conclusions reached in response to each question are based on evidence-supported findings about the implementation and effects of the various components of the ESP.

### **Achievement of Planned Objectives**

#### ***Question 1: To what extent has the project been able to achieve its planned overall objectives?***

**Conclusion 1: The immediate strong outputs provided the necessary response to crisis in the public education system.** The evidence presented in project documentation shows that the ESP successfully met the very ambitious targets set for nationwide training programs for newly hired assistant teachers (115,722) and MOE district-level social worker departments (271) and BOTs (23,533). Likewise, the ESP established a national presence, with implementation in all governorates.

**Conclusion 2: The methods of implementation contributed to the rapid response and a foundation for sustainability.** Not only did the ESP deliver the expected outputs but the evidence points to important effects as a result of the methods used to carry out these tasks. The training programs were implemented through a bottom-up, decentralized approach led by the five ESP regional offices, working with and through the MOE officials at the governorate and district levels. This approach coupled with the cascade training model strengthened capacity, stability, and ownership at the local level. In addition, because the ESP adapted training modules and lessons (as well as staff) from previous USAID/Egypt education projects, the program was on the ground quickly and familiarity with the approach in the MOE and many districts contributed to acceptance and legitimacy.

## **School Governance and Local Leadership**

### ***Question 2: To what extent has BOT participation increased in terms of effective school management?***

**Conclusion 1: BOTs that received ESP training were more effective than BOTs not exposed to this training in filling their role in school governance.** The evidence and findings to support this conclusion are drawn from focus group discussions with 16 BOTs in five governorates. Of the 16 BOTs included in the evaluation, ten had received ESP training and six had not. The focus group discussion protocol was based on the Board of Trustees Assessment Tool (BOTAT) and included questions about BOT processes, identification of school needs, mobilization of resources, levels of participation, and networking within the community.

In spite of the small size of the BOT sample, differences were evident between the BOTs that had and had not received training, which were confirmed in general by the broader ESP final Board of Trustees Assessment Study (September 2014). At the same time, these differences were not large and were confounded by other factors like location (Upper Egypt and rural/urban.) For example, with or without training, village BOTs tended to be more linked into their school community than urban BOTs, reflecting the differences in communication patterns and social interaction.

All BOTs supported the school in repair of school infrastructure, but BOTs that had been exposed to training were more likely to be engaged in broader student issues like drop-out rates or weak performance. BOTs that had received training on resource mobilization also reported more effective and varied fund-raising to respond to school needs. All BOTs said that 10% to 15% of parents attended the general assembly for elections, but participation of BOT members in monthly meetings was highest for those with training (10 or 11 of the 13 members.) BOTs exposed to training were more likely to do informal planning for the school year and self-assessment, which contributed to a more structured approach to tasks and division of responsibilities.

**Conclusion 2: The observed influence of ESP training on BOT participation in school management may diminish over time.** Findings suggest that the effectiveness of the training for participation in school management may not be sustainable. Only three people associated with each BOT, the BOT chairman, the school director, and the school social worker, received the ESP training, and some BOTs were exposed to more modules than others. The evaluation team found minimal evidence of diffusion of training lessons between the individuals trained and the other BOT members. In most cases, BOT membership has not changed since 2011, but with upcoming elections and transfers of school directors and social workers to new schools, the lessons from the training may be lost. Second, the focus group discussions showed that for all BOTs, limited financial resources were the core constraint on effective participation, particularly in Upper Egypt. This constraint has not been resolved by training.

**Gender Considerations:** Gender equality and women's empowerment are central aspects of USAID policy and required components of all activities and evaluations. In the ESP, the majority of the teachers and social workers trained were women. The assessment of outcomes of the AT training showed no

meaningful differences by sex – men and women reported and demonstrated the same responses to the training experience. The training of social workers, however, was significant in terms of women’s empowerment, demonstrating a strong positive effect on self-confidence and a sense of professionalism within a profession dominated by women that has been traditionally under-valued and under-utilized.

The principal focus of the ESP on gender equality was the lack of women’s involvement in the BOTs, in spite of mother’s dominant role in support of their children’s schooling. A case study identified several factors that may deter participation including the openness of school administration to parents, the culture of the BOT, and the belief, which is stronger in some areas than others, that formal participation in public institutions is the sphere of men in the family. The ESP engaged in isolated activities to encourage mothers’ presence in the school but these activities were cut short due to re-programming. Future activities should include investigation of existing tools to encourage women’s involvement and attention to idiosyncratic and contextual factors in the community and school.

**Scientific Clubs:** The evaluation team observed a generally positive reception to the concept of the Scientific Club in the schools, on the part of the directors and teachers involved, as well as by the ESP regional staff. In addition, in one school the team visited, the parents of students in the club came forward to provide testimony to the evaluators about the importance of the club for their children and to urge continuation of the clubs and expansion. Interestingly, the role of BOTs was discussed in terms of proactive behavior inviting volunteers to work with students in scientific clubs.

### **Educational Quality**

#### ***Question 3: To what extent have students’ reading skills improved?***

**Conclusion 1: Parents, teachers, and school directors reported that they saw significant improvements in literacy skills among the students in the Remedial Reading program, and recommended that the program be expanded to more students and grades.** Given the resource constraints the evaluation did not collect direct measures of students’ reading skills or of change over time, but rather relied on educators’ and parents’ perceptions of change. The reports were consistently and strongly positive across all observers and schools. Many teachers interviewed provided emotional testimony about the effect of the program on the behavior, attitude, and commitment of the poor performing students as they overcame the barrier of illiteracy and were able to participate with other students. School directors cited the objective change in skills as measured by the placement test at the beginning and end of the program, and observed that changes in reading also lead to changes in performance in other subjects.

**Conclusion 2: The training for Remedial Reading teachers was effective.** All of the Remedial Reading teachers interviewed said that the training gave them the strategies they needed to improve the reading and writing skills of their students. Some would have liked the training to be longer with more concrete examples. Across the board, district, governorate, and central level MOE reading unit officials expressed their support for the Remedial Reading training and their intent to expand the program in the coming year to correct the acknowledged deficiency in literacy in the schools. This conclusion is also applicable for Question 4 below, but with regard to ATs.

**Conclusion 3: Additional materials, especially student workbooks, will be required to expand the program. Some governorates and schools have leveraged resources for reproduction.** While the ESP widely distributed supplementary copies of teacher training materials, the governorates included in the evaluation reported a lack of student workbooks, and efforts to generate resources at the local level to reproduce them. Reading Unit directors in the governorates and districts also cited needed revisions in the teacher manuals for correction of grammatical errors and to include transitional materials to bridge the skill gap between the first and second levels of the program.

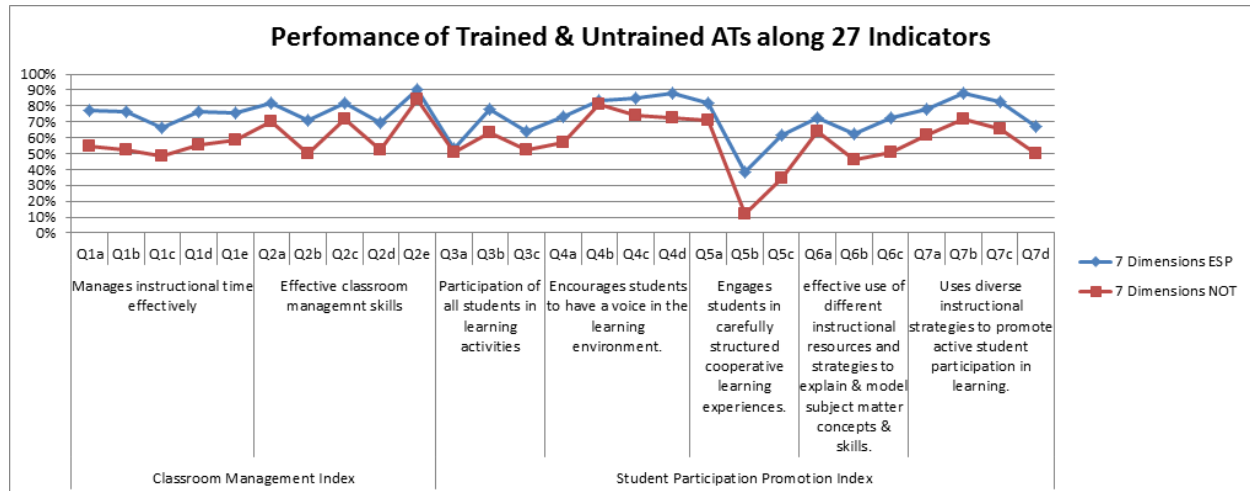
**Conclusion 4: Sustained implementation of the Remedial Reading Program in the schools would be strengthened by training of supervisors and other stakeholders (for a community of reading) and strengthening of a network of teachers who participated in the training.** Some teachers reported on-going communication through social media with other teachers they met in the training to share ideas, as professionals, from their practice. At the same time, some teachers discussed the importance of having supervisors and inspectors participate in the training to familiarize them with the new approach and to build additional support for strengthening literacy skills.

#### ***Question 4: How has teacher performance changed?***

**Conclusion 1: The ESP training provided to Assistant Teachers was effective in improving their teaching and thereby the performance of their students.** Two types of evidence support this conclusion. First, in interviews, school directors and the assistant teachers themselves affirmed that their teaching improved as a result of the training, particularly in the areas of classroom management, teaching/learning strategies, and assessment methods. Teachers emphasized that the practical and workshop nature of the training was effective and that they have been able to use it in their classrooms. Directors and teachers also said that an additional benefit of the training was that the teachers became more confident in their ability to teach and as a result their teaching improved.

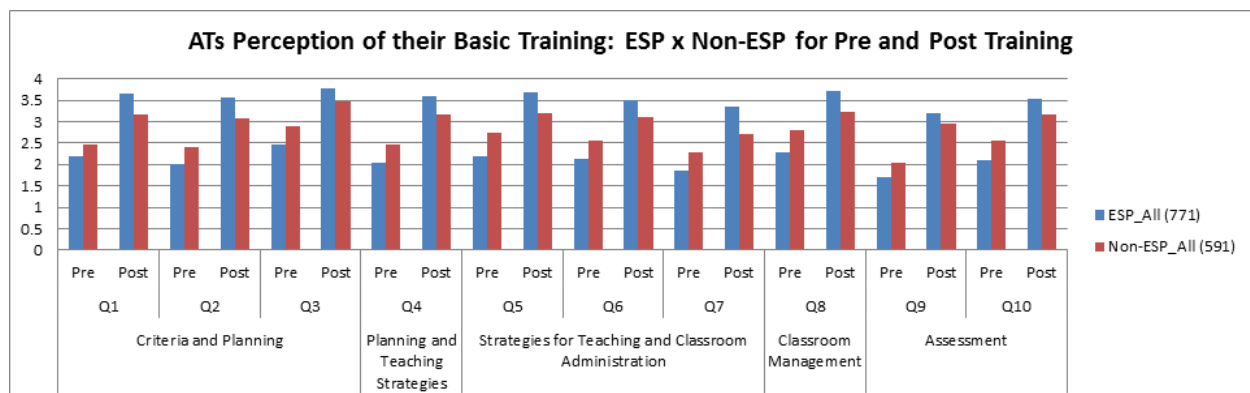
The evaluation also utilized quantitative evidence gathered through classroom observation to compare the performance of ESP-trained teachers to those who had not been trained. The data represented in Graph 1 suggests that the classroom performance of ESP-trained teachers was better than that of the non-ESP teachers along almost all the seven dimensions of classroom performance measured by the modified SCOPE (Standards-based Classroom Observation Protocol for Egypt) tool. The data indicates that the area that would need more attention in future trainings is to “engage students in structured cooperative learning experience.” Overall, ESP-trained teachers performed higher on two principal components, classroom management and student participation. Observed differences in performance for female and male teachers were minimal.

Graph 1



**Conclusion 2: The AT training was successful in creating a cadre of teachers who recognized the benefits of the initial training and also want more training to reinforce their teaching/learning strategies, particularly in their subject matter areas.** The value the ATs themselves attributed to the training is reflected in the responses of ATs to the survey questions about their perceptions of various aspects of teaching before and after training, comparing ATs that had received ESP training and those that had not. Data presented in Graph 2 indicates that: 1) both categories of teachers learned from their respective training; 2) the perception of the ESP-trained ATs of their knowledge before training was lower than that of the non-ESP ATs; and 3) those trained by ESP perceived their knowledge after training as higher than those not trained by ESP. In addition, when the ATs were asked in face-to-face interviews whether they would like to have more training, nearly all said they would like additional training about teaching methods for their specific subject areas.

Graph 2





**The Professional Academy for Teachers (PAT):** ESP support to the PAT throughout the project was a key element for sustainability of capacity-building and improved education quality. The mandate of the PAT is to establish and maintain quality measures and standards for the public school teacher's career path based on the teacher cadre concept and scheme. This mandate entailed introducing processes for: 1) certifying teachers to a cadre level based on qualifying criteria; 2) certifying training programs to be used for qualifying teachers; 3) certifying trainers to deliver these training programs, and 4) certifying training providers/centers to ensure that training delivery conforms to quality standards. The ESP supported the PAT in all aspects of this mandate, through hiring consultants to work with PAT in training program certification, in developing a corps of qualified trainers, and in preparing training centers for certification through provision of furniture, equipment, infrastructure and connectivity. The association with the ESP in operationalizing the certification processes added value to the educator's profession in Egypt. The following conclusions are drawn from key informant interviews with PAT staff, ESP staff, certified trainers, and teachers.

Conclusion 1: The ESP successfully supported the PAT along a number of critical dimensions for institutional development. ESP was perceived positively by the PAT in terms of shared objectives, support for PAT achievements and a high level of cooperation and communication.

Conclusion 2: Sustainability of these achievements may be diminished if resources commensurate to ESP financial support are not available, or if measures are not in place to ensure the continued transparency, independence, and objectivity of PAT certification processes.

### **Sustainability and Institutionalization**

#### ***Question 5: To what extent are the project's achievement and results sustainable?***

Sustainability in terms of retention, application, and utility of the training content was a consistent theme in ESP design and implementation, and has been examined in relation to each of the ESP components. The evaluation also examined three dimensions of sustainability in terms of the ESP process of training delivery and of the response it provided to the issues of education quality.

**Structural Sustainability** (mechanisms to formalize the training delivery process): The ESP was implemented through and in close collaboration with the existing MOE units at the governorate and district levels through capacity-building and tools to strengthen these units, engendering ownership of the programs and capacity and commitment to continue implementation of the AT, Remedial Reading, and Social Worker training after the termination of the ESP. Likewise, sustainability was enhanced through the institutional support of the PAT and the cascade-training model. Sustainability will require that the PAT assume the key role played by the ESP regional offices in quality assurance so that the training delivered at all levels maintains uniform standards for content and delivery.

**Financial Sustainability** (access to and control of resources for the training process): This dimension is problematic. Limited access to funds was cited as a constraint on training at all levels – the schools,

districts, and governorates. The ESP supported the training process financially through payments to trainers, provision of per diem and transport for trainers and trainees, training venues, and printing and distributing materials, as well as through furnishing of training centers and support of the PAT. No clear mechanisms are in place meet these costs, and interviews suggested that at the local level undue reliance for financial support was being assigned to the BOTs.

**Decision-making** (lines of authority to manage and update training): The ESP was implemented during a time of social upheaval when the national centers of decision-making and authority were in flux and relatively weak. The ESP capitalized on this situation and worked with the sub-national authorities to act in the interests of their own spheres of control, building a sense of empowerment at the local level. As the social situation stabilizes and the centralized bureaucratic structure is reinforced some of the movement toward decentralization may be challenged.

## **Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

### ***Question 6: Based on the evaluation findings, what are the lessons learned from the project's inception to date that USAID should consider in the design of future activities in the area?***

1. Future activities should be designed to reinforce the foundation for decentralization that developed under the ESP through support for governorate- and district-level decision-making and budget control. (One example might be a focus on district planning, scheduling, and funding of cadre training for local teachers and social workers.) Likewise, mechanisms should be identified to maintain the local and regional networks among governorates, districts, and schools that were nourished under the ESP by the ESP regional offices.
2. In developing an approach to increase the effectiveness of BOTs in school management it is necessary to go beyond the uniform BOT training modules available through the school social workers, and take account of both the idiosyncratic situation of each local board and the need to build a broad cross-cutting base of citizen participation in schools to support the BOT mandate.
  - A comprehensive study on BOTs should be conducted before any further investment. The recommended study should examine both social and economic dimensions, including attention to women's participation and the community context, especially rural/urban differences.
  - Many BOTs operate independently, within the school. To increase BOT effectiveness in fostering community participation and involvement, attention should be given to building networks and linkages, both horizontal with peer/neighborhood BOTs, and with local NGOs, and vertical with BOTs at the governorate level to provide more access to governorate resources.
  - BOTs require additional capacity-building to effectively understand and carry out their role in school management. In addition to training, capacity-building activities should include:

collective workshops at the governorate level, with representatives from various BOTs to foster exchange of experiences; national events that promote the role of BOTs in the society and build social recognition for this role; exchange visits among BOTs at the local, governorate, and national levels; and a media campaign to raise awareness about community participation in education management in general and school management in particular.

3. The MOE has endorsed and expanded the utilization of the ESP core training for ATs (Educational Applications) and the ESP Remedial Reading and Writing activity. In the future, USAID should support formalization of these activities through:
  - Training other school staff and community stakeholders on the remedial reading program especially inspectors, directors, and parents to build a community of practice and support around the importance of reading;
  - Seeking to identify reliable mechanisms to ensure that the necessary workbooks and manuals are available to all schools, including those in poor rural areas. An example of a step in this direction would be to work with the districts to generate a list of potential funding sources and activities to generate funds to share with the district and school BOTs;
  - Supporting the institutional structures that are in place to ensure on-going review, revision, and updating of the teaching manuals and student workbooks;
  - Collaborating with the MOE in developing online mechanisms to facilitate continued and continuous training of teachers in all cadres, and in promoting online (and in-person) teaching circles for teachers, including those in remote areas.
4. The Professional Academy for Teachers is a key institution in building a sustainable and transparent structure for teachers' professional development.
  - Assist PAT in incorporating the flexibility in implementation that characterized the ESP to accommodate changes on the ground within its pre-planned objectives by introducing mechanisms that are responsive to national level changes/crisis and allow them to accommodate immediate changes and emerging needs.
  - Assist PAT in creating a business model that can sustain it as a semi-governmental entity.
  - Reinforce the role of PAT in its role of quality assurance of its products, policies, and training management. Provide support to PAT in institutionalizing quality measures for its certification processes. Maintenance of quality should be a component of the certification of renewals for training centers and trainers.
5. Future activities should include a component to study and advise on funding and budgeting to support maintenance and upgrading of training centers, courses, and materials. Additional attention also should be given to the trainer fee schedules and sources of compensation.